

**2015 KENTUCKY SCHOOL OF ALCOHOL AND  
OTHER DRUG STUDIES**

*PRESENTS*

**HELPING CLIENTS MOVE BEYOND  
PERFECTION IN RECOVERY**

*PRESENTER*

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## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

**Perfect**: having no mistakes or flaws; completely accurate;

**Perfection**: freedom from fault or defect; flawlessness; the quality or state of being saintly

**Healthy perfection**: able to achieve outstanding outcomes/rewards with minimal cost.

You consistently have a short gap between the objectives you set and the outcomes you achieve. When perfection is healthy it works for you, benefit society, and can increase your satisfaction with life, increase self-esteem and happiness. Healthy perfection can be the source of your success; you are primarily driven from within. In addition:

- You are a good problem-solver.
- You know when to distribute your time, because you analyze what is working and what is not working.
- You do not confuse activity with progress.

**Unhealthy perfection**: a type of perfection that does not work for you and does not lead to the results you desire. The larger the gap between your objectives and outcome, the more unhealthy the perfection. In addition:

- You keep going in the same direction whether it is working or not.
- You often confuse activity with progress.

In extreme forms unhealthy perfection can lead to:

- Depression
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Loneliness
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Suicide
- Loss of relationships
- Eating disorders
- Addictions
- Relapse

With unhealthy perfection, you are usually driven by:

- Fear of failure
- Co-dependence, disappointing others, a fear of criticism, fear of loss of love, fear of loss of approval, fear of economic security, fear of criticism, the need to be better than everyone else in order to feel adequate

## **SOURCES OF PERFECTION**

- The family of origin
  - Parental perfection and narcissism
  - Parental messages:
    - “You’ll never be good enough.”
    - “Why can’t you be like your brother (or sister)?”
    - “Is that the best you can do?”
    - “How come you didn’t get an ‘A’?”
    - “What will people think of you and this family?”
    - “I’m so disappointed with you.”
  - Sibling order
  - Dark family secrets
    - Good family secrets
    - Level one dark secrets
    - Level two dark secrets
    - Level three dark secrets
    - Level four dark secrets
  - Family role – a hero, little princess, golden child
  - Religious abuse – When you were growing up religion was used to shame your every wish, need, thought, desire, and behavior.
  - Gender socialization – “Girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice; boys are made of snails, nails, and puppy dog tails.”
  - Privilege – *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Unhappy Kids,*
- The media
  - Hollywood – *Perfect 10*
  - Top 100 lists
  - *People* magazine’s most beautiful people in the world
- School
- Sports
- The world of work
- Religion

## **ADDICTION AND PERFECTION**

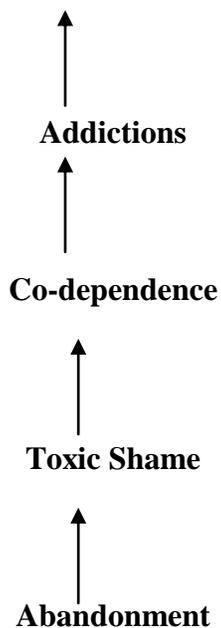
“You keep all the sinners and give us the drunks. The church is trying to push us toward perfection, and when alcoholics try to be perfect, we drink.” – Bill W, Letter to the Oxford Church

“We strive for spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.” – Alcoholics Anonymous

## **SOURCES OF PERFECTION FOR CHEMICALLY DEPENDENT CLIENTS**

- Abandonment and shame

### **The Iceberg Model**



**Source:** *Frozen Feelings: The Iceberg Model*, by John Freil.

- Co-dependence

### **Definitions of Co-dependence**

An emotional, psychological and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to and practice of a set of oppressive rules (Robert Subby).

### **Oppressive Family Rules**

1. Don't feel or talk about feelings.
2. Don't be who you are—be right, strong, and perfect.
3. Don't be selfish.
4. Don't have fun.
5. Don't get close to others.
6. Don't rock the boat.
7. You must be in control of all interactions, feelings, and personal behavior at all times.
8. You don't have a right to the five freedoms.
  - A.
  - B.
  - C.
  - D.
  - E.

### **ACOA's as Perfectionists**

- We are approval seekers.
- We tend to fear people in authority.
- We are extremely loyal, even when there is evidence that the loyalty is undeserved.
- We either marry alcoholics, become one, or choose some other compulsive personality (we then try to take care of them perfectly).
- We tend to put the needs of others ahead of our own needs.
- We tend to fear abandonment.
- We have a tendency toward perfection.
- We have a tendency toward procrastination.

- **Religious Shame**

“God expects you to be perfect.”

### **Definition**

Religious addiction can be described as a disease similar to alcoholism, workaholism, and eating disorders. Some of its symptoms include increased compulsivity, loss of control, continuation of the religious activity in spite of major life consequences.

### **Early Stages**

1. Ordinary religious or spiritual lifestyle
2. Excessive church going or reading of religious literature
3. Forgetting other important things as a result of preoccupation with church
4. Missing family gatherings
5. Thinking only of church
6. Secret irritation when church doctrines are challenged
7. Rationalizations begin
8. Loss of control begins
9. Trying to convert everyone to your way of thinking

### **Middle Stage**

1. Increased use of the church to avoid problems
2. Thinking the world/the body is evil
3. Excessive financial contributions
4. Feelings of extreme guilt when missing a religious activity
5. Sneaking attendance at religious meetings
6. Sexuality is perceived as dirty
7. Refusing to discuss, question, or doubt any of the doctrine
8. Loss of other interests
9. Starvation—in the name of fasting
10. Isolate more from others
11. Strong judgment of family and friends
12. Religious practices are not working—spirituality decreases greatly
13. Conflict at school/work/home
14. Major money problems

### **Late Stage**

1. Loss of jobs
2. Radical deterioration of relationships
3. Physical and mental deterioration—not eating
4. Unable to make decisions
5. Obsession with religious practices increases

6. Depression
7. Trances
8. Suicidal
9. Psychotic

- Perfection as sexual addiction

#### Negative core beliefs

- “I am unworthy of love.”
  - “My needs are never going to be met if I have to depend upon others.”
  - “If I have to depend upon my social skills to get close to others, it will never happen.”
  - “Sex is my most important need.”
- Perfection as an addictive relationship style

Smothering – “I need you to make me whole.”

- Perfection as romance addiction

#### Characteristics of romance addiction

- You are addicted to the idea of a relationship
  - You often fantasize about perfect love
  - You are a relationship anorexic
  - Your relationships are based primarily on romantic fantasies rather than reality
  - You often tie music into the fantasies
  - You fear abandonment and thus avoid relationships and get lost in the fantasies instead
  - You are in search of “perfect love” because you fear abandonment
- Perfection as compulsive gambling
    - “If I get the big win, everything will be okay.”
    - “Gambling is an escape for my having to be a superwoman.”
- Perfection as workaholism in recovery

## **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

### **STAGE ONE AND STAGE TWO RECOVERY**

Stage One Recovery - The primary goal of Stage One recovery is sobriety!  
This is a marvelous achievement.

#### **How addictions counselors can help clients deal with issues of perfection in Stage One**

1. Total acceptance
2. Being warm and genuine.
3. Being nonjudgmental
4. Self-disclosure – your own mistakes
5. By growing as a person and therapist
6. Paying attention to language – “dirty drops”; “clean and sober” “stick with the winners”.
7. Not personalizing relapses
- 7, Praising clients for their honesty in sharing their relapse
8. Treating relapse as a learning experience
9. Begin to talk to clients about their vulnerability.
10. Avoid rigidly believing that there is only one way to recover.
11. Owning our own tendency toward perfection.

#### **QUESTIONS**

1. In what areas, if any, does perfection show up in your life?
2. If you do have a tendency toward perfection, what are some things that drove you to perfectionism?
- 3, How does perfectionism show up in your work?
4. What, if anything, can you do about this?

Stage Two Recovery - What happens after sobriety. Making the most of a life that has been rescued from addiction. Striving to achieve the best quality sobriety!  
Primary goal of Stage Two is learning to make relationships work. Last things to change are negative core beliefs.

Help clients recover from negative core beliefs.

### **Negative Core Beliefs**

1. "I will never get my needs met if I have to depend upon other people."
2. "What other people think of me is more important than what I feel."
3. "God is going to get me."
4. "I am unworthy of love."
5. "I am ugly."
6. "There's only one right way to do things – my way."
7. "I am unworthy of success."
8. "I have no talent."
9. "You should never do anything for yourself; if you do, you're selfish."
10. "I have to be perfect."

(Some clients in Stage Two Recovery report that they are able to find their "soul.")

**Begin to help clients assess the nature of their perfection and its impact on them.**

**Have clients list how perfection rears its head in their lives.**

- Neatness
- Organization
- Writing
- Speaking
- Physical appearance
- Cleanliness
- The need for absolute knowledge

- Giving up too soon
- Procrastination
- Hoarding
- Avoiding situations in which they can't be perfect
- Recovery
- Relapse

### **Utilize cognitive behavioral therapy to address perfectionistic thinking styles**

- All or nothing thinking –  
 “If I get high, the world will come to an end.”  
 “If I can't stick to my diet perfectly, I am a failure.”  
 “I always need to look perfect.”  
 “If I can't get straight A's, I won't be good at my job.”  
 “If I don't do it, it won't get done right.”
- Excessive focus on the negative
- Mind reading – “They're thinking negative things about me.”
- Catastrophic thinking
- Excessively rigid standards
- Over-responsibility
- *Should* statements – “I should never make mistakes.” “I should never miss an AA meeting.”
- Comparisons

### **Utilize stage-based interventions**

- Pre-contemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance

How to help a client move through the stages of change

- Ask clients in pre-contemplation to list their 7 most important roles.
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.

- 5.
  - 6.
  - 7.
- Ask clients to list their top 7 values.
    - 1.
    - 2.
    - 3.
    - 4.
    - 5.
    - 6.
    - 7.
  - Ask clients to do a cost-benefit analysis.
  - Ask clients to make a commitment to action.
    - Set concrete goals.
    - Share those goals with others.
  - Put slogans and quotes in public areas to remind you that you do not have to be perfect.
  - Build up to the change slowly – “walking vs. jogging”.
  - Use social supports – support group; sponsor; therapist
  - Try to avoid daily tracking of success
  - View anxiety as information
  - Try not to stick with behaviors that are not working. “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” – Einstein
  - Start with the end in mind.
  - Utilize deliberate practice.
  - Utilize the 80/20 rule.
  - Do not turn a slip into a full-blown relapse. “I had a temporary setback.” – Women for Sobriety
  - Create balance